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THE MAN WHO ATE THE POPOMACK

By W. J. Turner.

OXFORD. BASIL BLACKWELL.
AT THE SHAKESPEARE HEAD

Imprimatur.—
The British
Drama
League

THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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The Man who ate the Popomack

W. J. Turner

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W. Saunders,
Edinburgh:
1923.

The Man who ate the Popomack

This Play has been selected for publication by the Reading Committee of the British Drama League.

THE MAN WHO ATE THE POPOMACK

A Tragi-Comedy of Love in Four Acts

By W. J. Turner

Oxford Basil Blackwell
Publisher to the Shakespeare Head Press
of Stratford-upon-Avon
1922

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Note

I WANT to say a few words about the technique of this play. I have not hesitated to allow two scenes existing only in the minds of some of the characters to take their place on the stage. It is my belief that the dramatic principles inculcated by all writers on the theatre have only a narrow, logical foundation and that like the rules of harmony and musical form with which unmusical professors have always tried to throttle creative musicians, they are aesthetically worthless. I also wish to add that actors must not think that the art of acting—unlike every other art —has already reached perfection. I prophesy that ranges of expression will be developed of which the present-day European or American actor has no conception—although, as with many new things, the first beginnings of this new art may be traced back in the past, as far as the fifteenth century in Japan and, probably, further elsewhere. The actor who is not prepared to cope with the difficulty of suggesting the various states of consciousness depicted in this play—the dream, the sub-conscious memory, the imagination—is unworthy of his art. This applies equally to the producer.

For the rest I hope no one will be so foolish as to say this play is badly constructed. It may be a bad play, but it is certainly not constructed according to the rules laid down by dramatic critics.

W. J. T.

Scenes and Characters

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MAN ABOUT TOWN. OLD MAN. A WOMAN. A MAN
FIRST YOUNG MAN. SECOND YOUNG MAN
MURIEL RAUB. LORD BELVOIR. PARLOURMAID

LADY OLIVIA, daughter of the Marquis of Beaufort

SIR SOLOMON RAUB, millionaire Jewish financier, head of Raub Bros, China & East India merchants

LADY PHAORON, a woman of fifty, wife of Sir Philo

SIR PHILO PHAORON, famous Egyptologist, small, and about 60-65

HARRINGHAM, butler to Sir Solomon Raub

NOSEGAY, valet to Lord Belvoir, a simple stolid fellow of 28

HON. RUPERT CLAVELLY

CAPTAIN ANTHONY, a creation of Belvoir's imagination, made up exactly to resemble the Old Man of Act I, but with a white beard

The Man who Ate the Popomack

SCENE. *A room on a Saturday morning at a London Picture Gallery. There is an ottoman facing a picture on a side wall, its end facing the audience. A man about middle-age, well-groomed, enters. He looks at a huge landscape and then at his catalogue.*

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Humph! Never saw anything like that in my life!

[*Another old man enters, his clothes of beautifully soft material, but hanging loosely about him. He stares at the same picture.*

OLD MAN. Mountains of the Imagination!

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. A diseased imagination, sir.

OLD MAN. Quite so; the imagination is a disease.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. I hate this modern fantastic stuff; it's morbid.

OLD MAN. It's the work of young men who cannot control their feelings.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Exactly; they might as well print their family secrets on the outside of their houses to amuse the milkman and the butcher-boy.

OLD MAN. Are you the milkman?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN [*taken aback*]. What do you mean?

OLD MAN. Then I am the butcher-boy. [*Reflectively*] I thank you. I did not know it, but I *am* the butcher-boy.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. I don't understand you.

OLD MAN. I am a critic. I came here to slaughter these so-called artists, and as a butcher I tell you they make poor mincement.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN [*interested*]. Really! You are a critic, and what is your honest opinion of modern art?

OLD MAN. Modern art has always been bad.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN [*chuckling*]. Ha, ha! Excellent! Splendid!

OLD MAN. But it is always more interesting than ancient art. You, sir, go to every exhibition?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Almost all.

OLD MAN. How often do you go to the National Gallery?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Whenever I hear of some interesting addition.

OLD MAN. Yes, the National Gallery is visited only by tourists.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. You don't say so!

OLD MAN. It is so calm there; they are glad to get out of the traffic.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Of course there is something stimulating about this modern stuff, I must say.

OLD MAN. As a milkman, would you call at an empty house to read what was chalked upon the door?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN [*chuckling*]. I see what you mean. I suppose not.

OLD MAN. Most modern paintings are mere chalk-marks on the door, *but the house is inhabited*, that makes all the difference. There is a human being inside. Have you ever travelled in the desert?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. No.

OLD MAN. Well, when you travel in the desert, and you have been hundreds of miles without meeting a soul and you come to some great stone tomb beautifully carved, and alongside it a miserable mud and willow hut, you find that you take no notice of the tomb but go eagerly up to the hut, for it may be inhabited. Well, that is why people look at modern pictures; we are really looking for the man who painted them, and if we heard that he was dead we should pass on to the next.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. That's very interesting. I never thought of that, but I believe . . .

[*They pass out of sight. The room is empty. Presently a fashionably-dressed couple enter. They stop before the same landscape.*

THE WOMAN. That's rather striking!

THE MAN. I suppose it is—queer, though, isn't it? I wonder where that is, or if it's any real place at all?

THE WOMAN. Look in the catalogue.

THE MAN. It says simply 'A Landscape.'

THE WOMAN. Whom is it by?

THE MAN. Oliver Bath—ever heard of him?

THE WOMAN [*interested*]. Oliver Bath.

THE MAN. I see he's dead; he died last year.

THE WOMAN [*her interest evaporating*]. Oh!

[*She turns away and they pass on out of sight. The room is again empty. Presently two young men enter.*

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*with a gesture round the room*]. Why are all these things painted? What does it mean?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Poor devils. They are unhappy in love.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Say unhappy in life, and you've hit it, but perhaps it's the same thing.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Of course it is.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. I don't know, but does one never work from joy?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Well, one wouldn't work long, would one?

FIRST YOUNG MAN. One might work better.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. I should think equally badly. Men who are either happy or unhappy are not artists.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Well; you must be one or the other, if you are a human being.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Artists are not human beings. Look at this fellow now [*pointing to a picture and affecting an American accent*]. Isn't he just too human?

FIRST YOUNG MAN. I grant you that nearly all bad art has the human touch. Still the artist and the man must meet somewhere, or a masterpiece, like a good hand at bridge, would be a sheer accident.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. And so it is—the accident that brought the artist's father and mother together. Life is full of accidents, and some of them are masterpieces.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. What of?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Design.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Whose design?

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*shrugging his shoulders*]. The Lord knows!

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*pointing to the pictures*]. What are these then?

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*with deliberation*]. Carefully planned mistakes.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Well, we come back again to the question: Why do they do it?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. If you are happy or unhappy you must do something. Have you never noticed that? That's why men marry, go into business, become bus conductors, or taxi-drivers, or politicians, paint pictures, start wars, or try to reform something—anything to forget their feelings! It is unnatural to have feelings as well as being uncomfortable. No cow is unhappy, no tree is miserable,and a stone doesn't even feel the cold.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. So art is just an occupation like any other?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. But immensely more occupying!

FIRST YOUNG MAN. But why is it so satisfying?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Because it makes us forget our pain. It's like holding up a bright banana to a hungry elephant: it arrests his attention even if it doesn't fill him.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. There's more in it than that.

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*ironically*]. Heaps more!

FIRST YOUNG MAN. That landscape, for instance.

[*They sit and stare at the picture.*

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Wilde was right: paint is much more interesting than real scenery. That's good, because it hasn't any cows in it.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. That man could have painted a cow without reminding us of milk.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Yes, there are no clichés. Just look at it! Extraordinary! Don't you feel as if you were there—and yet it's like nothing on earth!

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*slowly*]. One feels it's not going to rain, and the sun's not going to come out either.

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*passionately*]. No, nothing is ever going to happen, and yet one wouldn't go away for anything. [*After a long pause*]. By God! I've never seen anything so good! Whose is it?

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*looking at the catalogue*]. Oliver Bath—I see he's dead.

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*rising*]. He's not dead, he's there! Let's go.

[*They get up and pass out. The room is empty. Presently a tall young woman with dark hair and eyes enters, accompanied by a young man. It is* MURIEL RAUB, *the daughter of* SIR SOLOMON RAUB. *The man is* LORD BELVOIR.

BELVOIR. Let's sit down.

[*They sit down opposite the same picture.*

MURIEL. What do you think of that?

BELVOIR. It's queer—all those mountains! I feel nothing lives there. It's rather fine.

MURIEL. It's depressing!

BELVOIR. It's very strange; don't you feel that you've been there?

MURIEL. No.

BELVOIR [*looking straight in front of him*]. When I look at you I feel that I am far away, travelling in a country into which I have never been. It is a country like that, uninhabited but full of passion; where the mountains hang over the streams as if they were the invisible silence which surrounds the world charmed into huge blocks of stone by those toneless voices falling into the abyss of time. Like those mountains whose melancholy is carved upon the air, I sit listening to your voice which seems to come,

clear but very small and faint, as if it had barely struggled up from the very foundations of life to call me out of oblivion, and then to vanish away.

MURIEL [*moved, after a slight pause*]. How romantic you are! One would think we were sitting out a dance.

BELVOIR [*vexed*]. I never feel like this at dances. If I like my partner I simply kiss her.

MURIEL. Really! And does she let you?

BELVOIR. Why not? What else is there to do?

MURIEL [*ironically*]. How nice to have someone so practical! What a charming partner you must be.

BELVOIR. Have you never been kissed at a dance?

MURIEL. If it is a custom, I suppose I must have been. I've never really noticed.

BELVOIR [*biting his lip*]. Really you are a maddening little devil!

MURIEL. Only a moment ago I was a voice from— I forget where, but somewhere deep and wonderful.

BELVOIR. So you are, you're everything, you've taken complete possession of my senses. When I shave I cut myself thinking of you, when I eat I don't notice what I'm eating; I gulp down blindly everything that's put before me. Half the time I simply don't know what I'm doing, for I'm thinking of you, of when I last saw you, of when I shall see you again. Muriel, I adore you, I cannot live without you, I . . .

MURIEL [*putting her hand softly upon his mouth*] Ssh! [*The* MAN-ABOUT-TOWN *and the* OLD MAN *re-enter.*

OLD MAN [*taking no notice of the couple*]. Of all the follies of which mankind is capable, love is the most absurd!

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN [*impressed*]. Really! Is that your serious opinion?

OLD MAN. No, sir, it is not my serious opinion. I have no serious opinions. I gave them up long ago.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. Still, you think love is absurd.

OLD MAN. It is absurd, because it is never reciprocated. The poets tell us of couples who have loved equally—couples long ago in the prehistoric past, but no one has ever met such couples. Love is like hunger: whoever heard of a reciprocated hunger? You might as well expect a mutton chop to desire to be eaten!

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. That's a novel idea. I must say it never occurred to me before.

OLD MAN. It wouldn't, sir. Ideas don't occur to people in this country. The question in every love-affair is which is the mutton chop? [*He suddenly sees the couple on the settee and stares abstractedly at them for the moment. Then he turns and repeats aloud.*] Which is the mutton chop?

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN [*embarrassed*]. Well, what is your opinion, sir, of this show as a whole?

OLD MAN. My opinion, sir, is that they are all mutton chops; never a spark of life among them —except that fellow! [*He points to the landscape*

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN. What do you think is the reason of the low level of modern art?

OLD MAN. The reason, sir, is that Nature produces too many fools.

[*They move away and slowly go out.* BELVOIR *and* MURIEL *wait until their footsteps are out of hearing*

MURIEL. Now go on!

BELVOIR. What was I saying?

MURIEL. You were proposing to me.

BELVOIR. Was I? I didn't know it.

MURIEL [*teasingly*]. Do you mean to say you weren't going to propose to me after all that preparation?

BELVOIR. What preparation? Do be serious, Muriel. I love you, I adore you; it is impossible for me to say what you mean to me.

[*He takes one of her hands.*

MURIEL [*mischievously*]. Are you proposing now?

BELVOIR [*throwing aside her hand*]. Damn it, Muriel, you really are heartless! You don't care a rap!

MURIEL [*smiling at him*]. How do you know? You've never asked me!

BELVOIR [*moodily*]. Does one need to be asked? Did you ever ask me? I love you! I can't help loving you! I want to shout it aloud from the housetops! I want to take every man by the shoulder

and say to him, 'I love Muriel! Poor fellow, *you* don't know her!' I go about all day with your name on my lips. I am always frightened it will come out before I can stop it when anyone speaks to me. When I am in the country, absolutely alone, I can then say your name aloud. It is wonderful to hear it in that stillness among the hedges and the clouds.

MURIEL [*softly*]. But don't you want to know whether I love you?

BELVOIR [*passionately*]. Muriel! My darling! Do you?

MURIEL [*teasing him*]. Well, I might do worse than marry you.

BELVOIR [*rising*]. Really, Muriel, you are the limit! I can't stand much more of this sort of thing!

MURIEL [*taking him by the arm and making him sit down*]. I never said I didn't love you.

BELVOIR. Well, do you?

MURIEL. It's possible.

BELVOIR. Possible be damned! Muriel, do you or do you not love me?

MURIEL. I don't dislike you.

BELVOIR. My God! you really are impossible!

MURIEL [*provokingly*]. Well, why have anything to do with me? I didn't ask you to make love to me.

BELVOIR. How can I help it when I look at you? You shouldn't let me see you. You are a cold-blooded devil: I am going to leave you!

MURIEL. Very well.

BELVOIR [*despairingly*]. Muriel, you don't mean it!

MURIEL. Mean what?

BELVOIR [*slowly*]. I am going to ask you once more. Muriel, do you love me or not? If you don't answer me, I shall go, and you'll never see me again.

MURIEL. How absurd! I shan't answer it.

BELVOIR [*rising*]. Very well, I'm going.

MURIEL [*taking his arm and drawing him to her, softly*]. Kiss me!

BELVOIR. Muriel! [*They embrace passionately.*

[*The* TWO YOUNG MEN *re-enter.*

SECOND YOUNG MAN. I want to look at that landscape again before we go.

[*He observes* BELVOIR *who is busy buttoning* MURIEL'S *unfastened glove and turns away. They stand regarding the picture in silence for a few minutes.*

I am not so sure that nothing is going to happen. That picture gives me a most curious sensation. It's like the feeling that you are standing in the midst of a scene but that at any moment the whole of it may crack and give way, and you will fall right through.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Where to?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Oh, God knows! Come on, let's go!

[*They go out. As soon as they are out,* MURIEL *and* BELVOIR *turn and kiss passionately.*

MURIEL [*rising*]. Let's go and have lunch.

BELVOIR [*rising and kissing her hand*]. Muriel darling, do you love me much?

MURIEL [*gaily*]. Oh, infinitely! Come on, let's go.

BELVOIR. Wait a minute. I want to buy that picture. I feel it has something to do with this. [They look at it.] Don't you like it?

MURIEL [*with a slight shadow on her gaiety*]. It's depressing.

BELVOIR. It's very fine. It has exactly the feeling I should have if I lost you. What's its number in the catalogue?

MURIEL. Eighty-seven.

BELVOIR. Let's find the fellow in charge.

MURIEL [*as they are going*]. Reggie!

[*He takes her in his arms and kisses her. They go out. The room is empty. Presently an attendant comes in, goes up to the picture and affixes in its corner on the glass the little red seal signifying that the picture is sold.*

CURTAIN

Act II

SCENE:—*The drawing room of* SIR SOLOMON RAUB'S *town house in Charles Street, Mayfair, Folding doors L. to music room and door R.* PARLOURMAID *enters through folding-doors carrying a large spray of roses, passes through the room and goes to glass over the mantlepiece, where she pins the roses in her dress, and goes out R. Shortly afterwards* LADY OLIVIA *enters followed by* MURIEL. LADY OLIVIA *goes to settee near fire and sits down.*

MURIEL [*as she enters*]. Roses! how beautiful they smell!

LADY OLIVIA. What roses, Muriel? There are none here.

MURIEL. There must have been. I can smell them.

LADY OLIVIA. You are always smelling things that no one else can [*peevishly*]. It is a shocking habit, and very bad manners. [*Holding her bottle of smelling salts to her nose*]. I can smell nothing.

MURIEL. You never can smell anything, mother.

LADY OLIVIA. Muriel! You are positively disgusting! Why should one smell? In any decent house the sense of smell is unnecessary.

MURIEL. I get great pleasure from my sense of smell.

LADY OLIVIA [*with a slight shudder*]. Really, Muriel! Is smell a sense?

MURIEL. Of course it is—one of the five senses.

LADY OLIVIA. Well, four is too many for any woman of breeding; why should you try to cultivate a fifth? It can only lead you into more mischief.

MURIEL [*coldly*]. Mischief! Whatever do you mean?

LADY OLIVIA. Should I ever have married your father if I had not been carried away by my four senses? Heaven knows whom I'd have married if I'd had a fifth!

MURIEL. Someone still better.

LADY OLIVIA. Don't slight your father. It's probably from him you get this wonderful sense of smell. When I first knew him, he was always complaining that the English never wash. That's why he loathed going where there would be crowds. I had the greatest difficulty in getting him to take me to the Court balls, but I used to say 'it's a penalty you pay for being a foreigner. It's not that they don't wash: it's that they're English. If you were an Englishman, you wouldn't notice it, for you would be the same yourself.'

MURIEL. I think he is quite right. I have noticed it myself.

LADY OLIVIA. Yes, because you are only half-English; and what I say is, what is the good of your sense of smell? It's only an annoyance. The best thing you can do with it is to lose it. There! I've said something that I am sure is in the Bible!

[*Enter* Sir Solomon Raub *with* Lady Phaoron *who never rises with the ladies, but always staysand smokes a very strong cigar and drinks several glasses of port with the men; after them follows* Lord Belvoir *and* Sir Philo Phaoron.

Lady Phaoron. I hope you don't mind if I smoke a pipe, Lady Olivia?

[Muriel *makes a wry grimace.*

Lady Olivia. Oh dear no, not in the least, dear Lady Pharaon. I never smell anything.

Lady Phaoron [*throwing a half-smoked cigar into the fire and taking out a pipe*]. The cigars one gets now since they put the extra duty on are so unsatisfying.

Sir Solomon [*who is smoking one*]. Like most European products they are for tired business men, not for connoisseurs, dear lady.

Sir Philo. In ancient Egypt, women did not smoke. [*Dreamily, as if slowly tasting the comfort of it*]. In fact, they did not eat with the men, but had their meals in their own apartments.

Lord Belvoir. Was there any special reason for that?

Sir Philo. No special reason, Lord Belvoir, but it was an ancient custom; and I venture to think originally an æsthetic one.

Muriel. Do you mean that they idealized women and could not bear to see them feeding like animals?

Lady Phaoron. The question is could the women bear to see the men eating?

LADY OLIVIA. So long as they all ate together, my dear, I don't see that it would matter. I always keep something loud to chew when my neighbour is unfortunate in his teeth-equipment. I've often thought that the soup course is only tolerable because we all do it simultaneously. As my mother always used to say to us girls in the nursery, 'Keep together! Don't get scattered!'

SIR SOLOMON. Well, I wonder if the ancient Egyptians ever ate the fruit we are going to have tonight.

SIR PHILO. Oh, is it something special?

SIR SOLOMON. Yes; in fact it is, I believe, the rarest and most delicious fruit in the world and totally unknown in Europe.

LORD BELVOIR. What is it called?

SIR SOLOMON. It is called the popomack.

SIR PHILO. What does it taste like?

SIR SOLOMON. Well, I don't know. There are, I understand, very few people in the world that do know.

SIR PHILO. But how do you know it's edible at all?

SIR SOLOMON. It has been celebrated as a great delicacy throughout the East from ancient times. I believe Marco Polo refers to it somewhere.

LORD BELVOIR. Where, may I ask, did you get it?

SIR SOLOMON. Well, perhaps I had better tell you all about it. Years ago when I was in Canton on a business visit to our house there, I was invited

to a banquet by Fu-chi-li, the governor of the province, who was a Mandarin of very high rank. He had been a friend of Li Hung Chang's and was immensely rich. In his day he had taken an active part in politics, and had experienced many vicissitudes of fortune. During some temporary reverse, it was my father's privilege and good luck to render him a considerable service which he repaid a hundredfold, while still, as is the custom in the East, considering himself not only my father's debtor, but after his death his son's also. Well, days before the banquet, I realized that something very special was going to happen; in fact one might have said without exaggeration that the whole town buzzed of it. When the eventful evening came I found that I had been extraordinarily honoured. There were only two other guests, both Chinese of exalted rank. We had a repast such as it is impossible to describe.

MURIEL. How did you talk to them?

SIR SOLOMON. Oh, they spoke perfect English but [*knitting his brows*] I can't remember what we talked about. Anyhow towards the end of a delihtful meal, Fu-chi-li rose and struck a small silver gong. And here I will follow his example and call Harringham. [*He goes to the gong and strikes it. The lights immediately go out and they go up again upon the interior of a Mandarin's House in China.*

Seated round a table are three Chinese and an Englishman. The host, a Mandarin of high rank, has a gong beside him. The remnants of a repast not yet quite completed are on the table. There are no servants in the room.

MANDARIN. I do not understand the Western ideas of love. I have been reading an English novel called *Maurice Guest*, in which the young man Maurice loves a woman who does not love him. How is that possible?

ENGLISHMAN. It is not only possible; it is the custom. Oscar Wilde would have said it was the only form of real love known to man.

MANDARIN. Ah, Oscar Wilde. I have read him. He is another symptom of your disease.

ENGLISHMAN. You think that the West is diseased?

MANDARIN. In everything you are looking for something else. That is your disease. Here, when a man wants a woman, he takes a woman —any man and any woman, it is all the same. What difference can there be? You take a woman and you look at her. You look at her hair, her eyes, her mouth, her limbs—all sound; and yet you are doubtful; you look again. What are you looking for? You do not know. Well, perhaps you go away; perhaps you sleep with her or, as you say, marry. Well, you embrace her, you enjoy her; but as you lie beside her during the night gazing at the ceiling which you cannot

see, you ask yourself: 'Is that all?' No one answers you. You get more and more bitter, and you say to yourself, lying there: 'My God, this is impossible!' But it is you who are impossible. You have had your pleasure, and yet you are not satisfied.

FIRST CHINAMAN. They call it 'divine discontent.'

ENGLISHMAN. I am a Jew, and I understand you. To my father, unfaithfulness would have been impossible. The idea would have been monstrous to him. He had his own woman; any other would have been superfluous and meaningless. But [*reflectively*] I am not like that.

MANDARIN. You were born among these people, and you have become contaminated.

ENGLISHMAN. I found an Englishwoman who attracted me more than any woman of my own race. Why was that?

MANDARIN. I do not believe there was any difference. She was probably less accessible socially, and your desire for her was the desire to overcome resistance. Evidently you have not got her. When you do, you will find she is just the same as the others.

ENGLISHMAN. I mean to marry her. To me she is more desirable.

MANDARIN. Yes, you too have got the disease. When you have her, you will wonder what you saw in her, and you will think simply that you

have made a mistake, and will spend your life looking in other women everywhere for what has never existed.

ENGLISHMAN. But these Western races are more subtle in love than we are. You can see it in their poetry and music. No pure Jew has ever been a first-rate creative artist.

FIRST CHINAMAN. All Europeans have confused minds. They look at an eyebrow, and they get an exquisite sensation. Then they embrace the woman with the eyebrow, and they get another sensation, also exquisite; but with this sensation they have lost the other. The eyebrow is now merely an eyebrow, and they are vexed. But why cannot they embrace one woman, and look at the eyebrow of another?

ENGLISHMAN. Well, I understand it. When you look at anything very beautiful, you cannot bear the thought that presently it will be gone, and gone perhaps for ever. So you desire to possess it, to fasten it to you, so that it will always be there for you to look at.

MANDARIN. Fu-Chi-Wang bought a beautiful lacquer screen; for a few days he saw it; for a few months his friends saw it; and now it is seen only by strangers. Fu-Chi-Wang does not know it is there.

ENGLISHMAN. He would miss it if it were taken away.

MANDARIN. Yes, his eye would come to life again.

ENGLISHMAN. Well, that is what I say about women. How can one stick to one woman as my father did without one's senses becoming dulled and blunted?

MANDARIN. It is not the same thing. When you are thirsty, water will always quench your thirst. You want thirst to be provoked, you want to be always thirsty. Water will not make you thirsty, nor does a wife awaken desire. Mistresses like alcohol tickle the palate without satisfying the appetite, and in the end destroy both.

ENGLISHMAN. But if you were always surrounded with water, you would never get thirsty.

MANDARIN. You soon get thirsty if you are not always drinking.

ENGLISHMAN. But in Europe when one mixes much with other women, one is always being attracted. To me every woman is unique: I should like to know them all. It is a pity there is not time enough.

MANDARIN. Fatal illusion! Each seems unique because there are many, since each is in a different relation to you. But it is the relationship which is unique. A rose in a garden affects me differently from a rose in a bowl; a yellow rose is like a woman in a yellow dress, and a red rose is like a woman in a red dress, but it is only a difference in dress or in shape or in size or in voice or in colour.

FIRST CHINAMAN. You cannot embrace a colour or a voice, and does it matter whether what you embrace is big or little? Perhaps your wife has wit, but you cannot sleep with her wit.

ENGLISHMAN. But these qualities awaken desire.

MANDARIN. Only in fools. The wise man loves to hear a beautiful voice, to see a beautiful colour. A voice is to be heard, not to be bought and put in a bed, and colour is to be seen, not hidden in the dark. But few men, and least of all Europeans, can enjoy with their eyes and their ears; yet there is no other way of enjoying colour and sound, and the body cannot rape the mind. [*Silence: then turning to the* SECOND CHINAMAN *who has not spoken*]. But you who are wiser than all of us have said nothing. Let us hear your opinion.

SECOND CHINAMAN. I think we are wiser, but I do not think we are right.

MANDARIN. What! You agree with the Europeans?

SECOND CHINAMAN. The finest types in the West are fastidious in love to a degree we should think ridiculous, but I discovered that they do not thereby lose virility. They are more, not less, passionate than coarser men, and both bolder and more subtle. They live more intensely and more deeply because their bodies are more conscious.

ENGLISHMAN. Do you, then, believe there is such a thing as love?

SECOND CHINAMAN. I do not know that perfect

love may not be enjoyed by man. In China, we try to separate our consciousness from our body. We give our body to women with less thought than we give it to the table, and our consciousness we keep for our friends. But there is no harmony in such a life. Our mind and our body should be one. We despise the man who eats grossly because he does not know what he eats. Shall we call it love when men live with women they do not know?

MANDARIN. But it is just because we do not know them that they are desirable.

SECOND CHINAMAN. The body and the spirit are one, but as the stone is less conscious than the tree, and the tree than the man, so one man is less conscious than another. Stones and trees love, for stones and trees live, but we do not call it 'love' since it is not full and conscious enough. Neither is lust full and conscious enough for that man who desires to live more and more richly, and such a man will inevitably turn away from it.

ENGLISHMAN. Then you believe that a man should sow his wild oats?

SECOND CHINAMAN. It is a strange expression but I believe the man who fears nothing and lives, will live according to the power that is within him. If it is a small power, he will satisfy it easily—whether with one woman or fifty is immaterial.

ENGLISHMAN. But what becomes of morals?

SECOND CHINAMAN. There is only one moral law which a man can break, and that is to be satisfied with less than his soul demands. Does it matter how many he breaks it with?

MANDARIN. Cannot the eye look with pleasure on a beautiful girl without wanting her as a mistress?

SECOND CHINAMAN. It is unknown what the soul craves for, but when we say a girl is beautiful we mean that our soul is suddenly more alive. This feeling of life is so exquisite, that we seize her greedily in the hope of more, and our life is as suddenly extinguished. Man must find out how to live. There is no recipe, although your churches pretend to give you one.

ENGLISHMAN. Do you believe in marriage as an institution?

SECOND CHINAMAN. Does a boatman believe in oars? Yes, until he is given sails? Does he then believe in sails? Yes, until he finds he can go easier and further with steam. Marriage has nothing to do with love.

ENGLISHMAN. Then you do not think that a man should be faithful to his wife?

SECOND CHINAMAN. To embrace a woman because she is your wife is like embracing her because she is your mother.

ENGLISHMAN. I do not understand you.

SECOND CHINAMAN. I mean that mere affection

should not drive you further than a mere affectionate embrace. To sleep with your wife when you are merely fond of her is a sin against love. To sleep with a woman whom you merely lust after is also a sin against love. In Europe both these habits are extremely popular.

MANDARIN. I understand you. You mean that they are different symptoms of the same disharmony.

SECOND CHINAMAN. The fruits of such unions are ugly in body and dull in mind. I remember standing at your Charing-Cross station watching the streams of young men and women going to business, and they looked like herds of disgusting animals. Mongrels, bred not from harmonious passion, but by accident! Naturally they mostly hate their parents.

ENGLISHMAN. Then the Western religious bodies are wrong in inculcating faithfulness?

SECOND CHINAMAN. Physical union without passion is a sin against life. Lovers who live together after their passion has died are disgusting to the gods and obviously blunted in mind and body. There may be passions so harmonious that they endure throughout the lovers' physical life; that is the only faithfulness. There is no virtue in hypocrisy even when it is called marriage.

MANDARIN. I do not believe that love is anything more than a pleasure like eating and drinking.

One likes some women more than others as one likes some foods more than others, but too much of any one of them will take away the appetite.

SECOND CHINAMAN [*ironically*]. In the beloved there is an infinity of life. The lover who has just left her for ever is carrying away on his sleeve a single hair.

FIRST CHINAMAN. One is quite enough, all the others are the same.

MANDARIN. I doubt the reality of this ideal Western love. It is too much of an abstraction. I should like to see it tested.

ENGLISHMAN. Well if I couldn't have one woman I'd have another. Of course I might prefer the one I hadn't got.

MANDARIN. Only because you hadn't got her . . . all else is illusion. It's the unknown that attracts us. [*With a gesture as if concluding the argument.*] If the popomack were as common as the pine-apple we should not make such a fuss about it, but as we know that we shall be accounted happy if we taste it once in our lives, it means a great deal more to us.

ENGLISHMAN. Have you never tasted it?

MANDARIN. Never. I remember my father telling me that when he was a young man the Governor of his province had one and held a great feast to eat it.

ENGLISHMAN. I feel deeply sensible of the great

honour you have done me in inviting me to-night to partake of this popomack. I am most curious to see it.

MANDARIN. Well my friends, the time has come for us to enjoy the most exquisite delicacy known to man. [*He strikes the gong, which reverberates slowly through the silence.*

[*The lights go out as a servant enters, and the scene is as before, with* SIR SOLOMON RAUB *standing by the side of the gong which is still stirring from the blow he has given it. The door opens and* HARRINGHAM *enters.*

SIR SOLOMON. Bring in the popomack! [*He turns to the guests.*] No doubt these were the very words Fu-Chi-li used to his servant, who however returned rushing into the room, white with terror, and falling prostrate, muttered something in Chinese at which the others started in astonishment. Even Fu-Chi-li was, I saw, visibly disconcerted, in spite of his extraordinary self-control. But almost immediately he was the urbane host again, and dismissing the servant he explained to us with many apologies that some unforeseen and altogether extraordinary circumstance had prevented his placing before us the unique dish with which he had wished to honour our presence. In spite of his exterior calm, the tone of his voice betrayed an emotion incompatible with any ordinary feeling of disappoint-

ment, but the other guests remained curiously impassive. I did not like to ask any questions, and when we parted later, after a stay somewhat briefer than usual, nothing further had been said.

LORD BELVOIR. And did you never learn what had happened?

SIR SOLOMON. Never!

SIR PHILO. But how did you know that he was going to give you a popomack?

LADY OLIVIA. And what is a Popomack? You have never told us that.

SIR SOLOMON. Well, when I told Furse, the manager of our Canton branch, what had happened, he said that Fu-Chi-li must have been going to give us a popomack; in fact he said he had heard rumours of it. Furse was a man of about fifty, the son of a Chinese missionary and born in China, and an absolute mine of out-of-the-way knowledge. He told me that every now and then, say once in fifty, or once in a hundred or even a couple of hundred years, a single popomack fruit turns up somewhere in the East, and that the knowledge of its existence spreads with extraordinary rapidity and causes the greatest excitement. There is tremendous competition to procure it, but all negotiations are mysteriously elaborate and secret; for the life of any man known to possess it would not be worth a string of cash. Specimens that have turned up in the

past have usually found their way to the Emperor or to some high Mandarin.

LORD BELVOIR. Had Furse ever seen one?

SIR SOLOMON. No, nor ever heard of the existence of one before.

[HARRINGHAM *enters carrying on a silver platter what looks like a huge blue orange; it has the shape of an orange, but the hard rind of a passion fruit or a pomegranate, and is as large as a good-sized melon and a vivid bright blue. They all gaze at it as* HARRINGHAM *places it on the table with a knife and a number of plates. He then goes out.*

MURIEL. What a lovely colour!

LADY PHAORON. I hope it won't give us indigestion

SIR PHILO. So that's a popomack! Extraordinary! Do you know, I believe it may be the strange fruit mentioned at the banquet of Amenophis IV of the XVIIIth dynasty about 1500 B.C. The reference to it has never been understood.

SIR SOLOMON. What does it say about it?

SIR PHILO. The passage is obscure. All I remember is that it mentions its colour as being remarkable and there was something else strange about it, but I have forgotten.

LORD BELVOIR. May I ask how you came to get it?

SIR SOLOMON. Furse sent it to me from Canton; it arrived two days ago. It was a piece of extraordinary luck and is really a remarkable story, which I must tell you some time. I determined

we should have it to-night in honour of your engagement with Muriel. And now I think it is time we cut this rarity. I am very curious to taste it.

LADY PHAORON. I hope it won't give me indigestion.

SIR SOLOMON [*as he takes a knife and proceeds to insert the point*]. Well, I'm sure it would be worth it. The Chinese are great epicureans and would never have made such a fuss about something that was merely ordinarily pleasant. This rind is very tough. [*He makes an effort and succeeds in inserting the point, then pushes the blade down.*] Good God!

ALL [*excitedly*]. What is it?

[*The popomack rolls into two cut halves, and immediately a frightful smell unlike anything they have ever experienced before pervades the room.*

ALL. Faugh! Ugh! It's appalling! Take it away! It's unbearable.

SIR PHILO [*jumping excitedly, holding his handkerchief to his nose*]. That's it! That's it! I remember now! It smells! *Une odeur épouvantable* Lefebure translates it. It's quite correct. It's the real thing! Wonderful! A divine colour, lapis-lazuli blue, and a smell like the plague!

SIR SOLOMON [*who has retreated to a far corner of the room with his handkerchief to his nose*]. Then you don't think there's anything wrong with it?

SIR PHILO. Wrong! Of course not! No, it's

absolutely correct. This proves it. [*Almost dancing in his excitement.*] Marvellous!

LADY PHAORON [*tartly*]. Marvellous! It's disgusting!

LADY OLIVIA [*the only one who has taken no part in the excitement now begins to sniff uneasily and suddenly puts her handkerchief to her nose*]. Oh, my fifth sense! I've found it!

[*She shrieks and immediately faints.* SIR SOLOMON *rings the bell and* HARRINGHAM *enters in his usual imperturbable manner, but suddenly visibly shrinks; he makes an involuntary movement towards his pocket, but recollects himself, and suppresses it with a face fearfully contorted.*

SIR SOLOMON. Help me to carry your mistress to her room, Harringham. You had better come too, Muriel. [*To his guests*] Excuse us one moment.

[*Exeunt* SIR SOLOMON *and* HARRINGHAM, *carrying* LADY OLIVIA, *followed by* MURIEL.

SIR PHILO [*his face beaming, at least that part of it which is not covered by his handkerchief*]. This is really thrilling! I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I'm going to taste it. [*He cuts a slice of the popomack and begins eating it*]. Ah! heavenly! Come on Belvoir, you must taste it. [*To* LADY PHAORON]. Will you try some, my dear?

LADY PHAORON. Certainly not, I shall go and see if I can be of any use to Olivia. [*Exit.*

SIR PHILO [*cutting another two slices and beginning a fresh one greedily*]. Here, you must taste it, Belvoir; you can't imagine how delicious it is!

LORD BELVOIR. Well, the smell is pretty awful, but I'll risk it.

SIR PHILO. That's right.

[LORD BELVOIR *begins to eat reluctantly, but his expression at once changes to one of intense satisfaction.*

LORD BELVOIR. You are quite right; it's really wonderful.

SIR PHILO. Yes, isn't it?

[*The two men go on in silence, eating greedily and cutting more slices until the popomack is more than half gone. Gradually they cease to hold their handkerchiefs to their noses, and by the time* SIR SOLOMON *returns they have put them back into their pockets. They are still eating when he returns.*

SIR PHILO. How's Lady Olivia?

SIR SOLOMON. She's come round, thank you, but she's going to lie down for a bit. This is really awful. I must apologize.

SIR PHILO. Apologize! Not at all! Taste it; it's wonderful! Heavenly! Isn't it, Belvoir?

[BELVOIR *nods, his mouth full.*

SIR SOLOMON [*hardly concealing his expression of disgust behind his handkerchief which he holds carefully to his nose*]. Faugh! I wouldn't dream of touching the stuff. I can scarcely bear to stay in the room with it.

SIR PHILO. Eat it, and you won't notice the smell; it's just the same with cheese.

SIR SOLOMON. No, thank you! But if you like it do you mind finishing it quickly?

SIR PHILO. Delighted! But I warn you you're missing something; isn't he, Belvoir? and you'll regret it.

[*He cuts the last slice and hands half to* BELVOIR *after cutting off the rind. The two men eat in silence.* SIR SOLOMON *watching them with a curious expression. Presently he rings for the butler. Enter* HARRINGHAM.

SIR SOLOMON. Take what's left of this away, and burn it!

CURTAIN

Act III

SCENE:—LORD BELVOIR'S *rooms in Half Moon Street, three months later. Morning. Enter* NOSEGAY *with a large scent-spray with a rubber grip; he works carefully round the room, spraying curtains, carpet, chairs, chesterfield and cushions. The room has two windows in the back wall, facing the audience and looking on to the street; against the right wall is a Bechstein grand with the stool at the far end, so that, sitting at the piano, you have your back to the window wall and look into the room. There are a few gilt upholstered chairs, a chesterfield near the fireplace to the left, several comfortable arm-chairs, a centre table with a few books, a book-case against the wall opposite the fireplace, and on the wall the landscape of Oliver Bath, and several water-colours. After spraying almost every article in the room except the piano,* NOSEGAY *carefully closes the windows. Suddenly a ring is heard, and he goes out, returning in a few moments preceded by the* HON. RUPERT CLAVELLY, *a fresh-looking young man of about thirty, with a cheerful air.* CLAVELLY *lifts his head as he enters as if secretly apprehensive of some invisible presence. He does this so adroitly that an eye-witness could hardly describe his action as a sniff.*

NOSEGAY. I will tell his lordship you are here.

CLAVELLY. Stop a moment, Nosegay. Tell me: does he—is it . . . as strong as ever?

NOSEGAY. I am afraid, sir, it is.

CLAVELLY. Good Lord, how awful! But here, this room . . . it seems all right, except . . . someone's upset a scent-bottle!

NOSEGAY [*going to the mantelpiece and taking the spray which he has put down there*]. No, sir, it's this, sir. I use it every morning, and always after his lordship has been here—Not that it has much effect then, sir!

CLAVELLY. Good heavens! Is it as bad as that?

NOSEGAY. Yes, sir; it's very bad, sir.

CLAVELLY [*his natural cheerfulness somewhat damped*]. Well, perhaps you had better tell Lord Belvoir I'm here.

NOSEGAY. Yes, sir [*he hesitates*]. Perhaps you won't mind my making a suggestion, sir, but . . .

CLAVELLY. Certainly, Nosegay, what is it?

NOSEGAY. Well, you see, sir, this is the first time you have seen his lordship since . . .

CLAVELLY. Since the Raub dinner?

NOSEGAY. Yes, sir, and . . . it will be a great shock, sir. It might help you if you smoked. [*Hesitating and in a lower voice*]. And there's another thing, sir, his face. It'll startle you, sir!

CLAVELLY. Oh, I see. Right! Thanks very much, Nosegay. [*He takes out his case and proceeds to light a cigarette.*

[NOSEGAY *goes out carrying the scent-spray. After an interval of a few minutes the door opens, and* LORD BELVOIR *enters in a dark silk flowered dressing-gown. The change in the man is extraordinary. At* SIR SOLOMON'S *dinner he would have passed as a good-looking young Englishman of about thirty-three, rather dark, with a slightly uncommon sensitive expression and the eyes of an artist, but very youthful, almost immature in spite of his age, like many Englishmen of his class. Now he looks every year of his age and more. There is a strange, almost mocking, expression on his face, and his eyes seem extraordinarily alive. His face has gone a bright blue, the colour of the Popomack. As he enters, closing the door behind him,* CLAVELLY *gasps, but moves towards him, holding out his hand.*

CLAVELLY. How are you, Reggie?

BELVOIR [*letting his hand drop*]. Smoking, Clavelly?

CLAVELLY [*taken aback and fearfully disconcerted by the popomack smell that proceeds from* LORD BELVOIR]. I only . . . I didn't know . . . I'll throw it away.

[*He is about to throw the cigarette into the fireplace.*

BELVOIR. No, no, that's all right. They all do it. Everyone I see—not that I see many nowadays [*grimly*]. You'll find you need it.

CLAVELLY [*finding himself unconsciously retreating from* BELVOIR *pulls himself up sharply and comes nearer*]. But, I say, can't anything be done?

BELVOIR. Tell me, Clavelly, this is the first time you've seen me since—since the night. Do you find it very strong?

CLAVELLY [*trying to look as if he were giving an opinion on a matter of no importance*]. Well, I don't know. Perhaps it's a bit of a shock at first, but I daresay . . .

BELVOIR. It's no use, Clavelly. You should see your face.

CLAVELLY [*with a burst of artificial energy*]. Look here, Reggie, this is damned unnatural! Surely something can be done?

BELVOIR [*quietly*]. No, nothing. I've tried everything, do you hear? Everything!

CLAVELLY [*helplessly*]. But it'll wear off. It's sure to wear off.

BELVOIR [*ironically*]. You really think so?

CLAVELLY [*stubbornly*]. Yes, of course I do; it must.

BELVOIR. So many people have said that. Try and think of something more original.

CLAVELLY [*desperately*]. Have you tried anything? Have you seen any specialists?

BELVOIR [*ironically*]. Oh, no, of course not. Why should I? There's nothing wrong with me, is there? Have another cigarette? Take one of these; they're specially strong. I keep them on purpose.

CLAVELLY. Damn your cigarettes! Why don't you talk decently to a fellow?

BELVOIR [*lifting his eyebrows*]. What do you want me to say? That you are the victim of your imagination? That this is a momentary illusion? That all will be well to-morrow? Comfortable lies to soften a quarter of an hour's unpleasantness! I've lied all my life, but I've done with lies now!

CLAVELLY [*obstinately*]. I can't believe there's nothing to be done.

BELVOIR. You'll have to believe it. [*with a change of tone*] Not that it really matters. For my part, I see no reason why *anything* should be done.

CLAVELLY [*sullenly*]. I don't understand you.

BELVOIR. I am not conscious of this unpleasantness which apparently afflicts my friends in my presence. To myself, I am a healthy, normal person. Why should I fill the rôle they invent for me, and be the catspaw of their diseased imaginations?

CLAVELLY. Do you mean to say you don't believe there is anything the matter with you?

BELVOIR [*frigidly*]. I must ask you to be more careful in your language. The fact that we have known each other for some time does not give you the right to make insulting remarks before my face.

CLAVELLY [*heatedly*]. Well, if that's the way you are going to take it . . .

BELVOIR [*coldly*]. Do you suppose there is any

other way of taking it? Shall I call you a fool, and wait for you to argue mildly that you don't believe it? Or shall I say that you stink like a skunk?

CLAVELLY [*Appalled*]. But . . . [*He stammers incoherently.*

BELVOIR. There are no doubt people who accept their character as their friends see it, and live the life their friends expect them to live. People who have no existence except in the minds of others and who seek to know what others think of them in order that they may live at all. I am not one of those people.

CLAVELLY. But there is no getting away from facts.

BELVOIR. What are the facts? My presence, let us say, arouses a particularly unpleasant sensation in you. Am I to pretend that I share that sensation when I do not? Am I to regulate my life on the assumption that my presence is an offence to you and a few others who, I must say, seem to me in no way indispensable to my existence.

CLAVELLY. Well, you cannot ignore their feelings.

BELVOIR. If I cannot share them, or if they deprive me of my self-respect, I *must* ignore them.

CLAVELLY. Look here, you know this is all nonsense! Why not be sensible and let me help you? It must be possible to do something?

BELVOIR [*deliberately*]. Clavelly, I have had three months of being sensible and allowing my friends to help me, and what have they done?

They have turned me into a perfectly useless, helpless object on which to exercise their emotions. I might as well be paralysed in mind and brain, and have lost control of every limb as lead the life I have led since last November. I have become a mere phenomenon to be dragged from one specialist to another, to be exhibited carefully to a few select friends, to be taken out to lunch or dinner occasionally with as much preparation and stage-management as would shift an army corps. I have watched my friends actually blooming in health through their activity in exploiting the emotional and theatrical possibilities of *me*. Yes, I have become a mere puppet —an interesting puppet, a puppet that eats and walks and sleeps, but which exists solely for the amusement of those who pull its strings, and has no life of its own to interfere with theirs. Presently they will get tired of me, and I shall be handed on to others. There always will be others, always an inexhaustible supply of fresh people to whom I shall be a novelty and a curiosity. But I have had enough of it: I am going to live my own life.

[*During the conversation* CLAVELLY *smokes hard, and edges involuntarily away from* BELVOIR *whenever he comes near. Now when he thinks that* BELVOIR *is not looking, he takes one of the special cigarettes* BELVOIR *pointed out to him.*

CLAVELLY [*comfortably handing him the cigarette box*]. Well, I don't see what you are going to do. What about Muriel?

BELVOIR [*hotly*]. What has Muriel got to do with you!

CLAVELLY [*flushing*]. Nothing . . . I only wondered how she was taking it. [*lamely*] I haven't seen her for some time—you know I've been away.

BELVOIR. Pity you ever came back. I should have thought Africa was just the place for you.

CLAVELLY. Now my dear old chap you're not going to ruffle me. I take it that your engagement is not yet broken off.

BELVOIR. What did you come here for? Have you no better way of spending your time?

CLAVELLY. Look here isn't there anything I can do for you?

BELVOIR [*with a deliberate sneer*]. How much longer do you think you can stand it?

CLAVELLY [*flushing*]. I didn't come here to be insulted by an old friend.

BELVOIR. Are you sure?

CLAVELLY [*nettled*]. Well, if you are determined to act in this manner there is nothing for me but to go.

BELVOIR. Your limited intelligence is working at last.

[CLAVELLY, *furious, seizes his hat and stick and leaves the room without another word.* BELVOIR

paces about the room for a few minutes and then, standing near the curtains, suddenly sniffs the air. He frowns violently and rings the bell.

Enter NOSEGAY.

BELVOIR. What is this smell of scent?

NOSEGAY [*blandly*]. What scent, my lord?

BELVOIR. Damn you! Don't quibble with me! The place reeks of scent. Who brought it.

[NOSEGAY *does not reply.* BELVOIR *stares at him furiously as if about to strike him, and then with a tremendous effort controls himself, and walks away.*

NOSEGAY. You have never objected to it before, my lord, and I have been doing it for the last month.

[BELVOIR *is facing the window with his back to* NOSEGAY; *after a few seconds he turns.*

BELVOIR. Nosegay, I want to talk to you. I have no fault to find with you, but if you are to stay with me, we must understand each other. It is possible that you would like to find another situation [NOSEGAY *shakes his head*]. Wait a moment! If you do—and in the circumstances it would be only natural, and I should in no way resent it—I shall make it my business to find you a situation in every way as good as your place with me before . . . before the event of three months ago.

NOSEGAY [*after a slight pause, simply*]. I have no wish to leave you, my lord.

BELVOIR. Thank you, Nosegay. And I should feel parting with you deeply. But we must not let

any feeling of . . . friendship blind us into imagining that it will bear the strain of our ordinary daily life. The situation must be a possible one without any feeling entering into it on one side or the other. Do you understand me?

NOSEGAY. Perfectly, my lord.

BELVOIR. Good! [*pauses, then resolutely.*] Now, do you think you can put up with and totally ignore this . . . this affliction of mine indefinitely? Don't you feel that it will become too much for you?

NOSEGAY. May I ask, my lord, is it . . . permanent?

BELVOIR. Yes. At all events, I am going to act henceforth as if it were. I am going to seek no cure. I am going to put it completely out of my mind and out of my life. It does not exist for me. It must not exist for you. But is that possible?

NOSEGAY. Will you permit me to ask a personal question, my lord? I have often wondered, but do you not notice it at all yourself?

BELVOIR. Absolutely not at all! Now can you live with me, and put it completely out of your mind?

NOSEGAY [*slowly*]. Yes, my lord, I think I can. I never had a very keen sense of . . .

BELVOIR [*smiling*]. No! Or you couldn't have sprayed the room with that filthy scent. Well, no more of that sort of thing, mind! And now we'll consider it settled [*the bell rings*]. See who it is.

[*Exit* NOSEGAY *and re-enters after a second.*

NOSEGAY. Sir Philo Phaoron, my lord.

BELVOIR. Show him up. [*Exit* NOSEGAY.

[*A noise as of a man dragging upstairs heavily is heard, then a curiously muffled voice shouting,* Mind those pipes, Nosegay! This way! Be careful now! *Suddenly the door flies open and* SIR PHILO PHAORON *enters clothed from head to foot in a complete diving-dress, followed by* NOSEGAY *carrying the long air pipes and communicating line. Waving one hand to* BELVOIR, *he has a speaking trumpet in the other with which he signals to* NOSEGAY *to deposit the tubes on the floor.*

[*Exit* NOSEGAY *closing the door.*

Whatever's the meaning of this, Phaoron?

[SIR PHILO *lumbers heavily across to the window and opens it. Putting his trumpet to his helmet he shouts* More air! Pump harder, you devils! I'm suffocating! *Then he closes it, turns and waves both hands to* BELVOIR, *and shouts through his speaking trumpet.*

SIR PHILO. Help me open this!

[BELVOIR *unscrews a nut as he is directed and then the front of the helmet swings open, revealing the beaming face of* SIR PHILO *covered with perspiration.*] Phew! it's hot in this rig-out. What a relief to find no one here! Well, my boy, how are you? Isn't this a magnificent idea? [*Pointing to his diving suit.* LORD BELVOIR *continues to stare at him in amazement.*] I only thought of it the other day. Now I can go anywhere. It's absolutely air-proof.

BELVOIR. Do you mean to say that you've been about in that get-up?

SIR PHILO. Certainly! and what is more, my boy, it's been an immense success. Three nights ago I tried it for the first time at the Royal Geographical Society's dinner. I had been fearfully upset at the thought of missing it. You know life hasn't really been worth living these last three months, and the idea that I should never go there again just about put the finishing touch on. I was sitting at home—I hadn't been out for a couple of weeks—reading some rotten book, *The Memoirs of a New Guinea Magistrate* it was, and the fellow was describing the diving in the pearl fisheries there when the idea suddenly came to me. I jumped up, went to the telephone, ordered the whole rig-out, and hired two seamen and a pumping engine—Do you hear it? It's outside —and tried it. It was perfect. Now my man dresses me in the morning, and when the fellows arrive they put the engine in the car, and I can go anywhere.

BELVOIR. Good God! And how did you get on at the dinner?

SIR PHILO. Of course, I couldn't eat anything, but my reception was tremendous. There was a fellow there who had just come back from climbing Mount Everest, but he was an absolute frost. No one took the slightest notice of him. At dinner I made a speech—with this trumpet and a special

metal diaphragm in the helmet I can speak perfectly—I rose in a perfect storm of cheers. 'Gentlemen,' I said, 'you see before you one who has suffered a severe blow at the hands of Fate —a calamity such as has hitherto befallen no living man' (Of course we don't know about those Chinese fellows who have eaten it. Probably they smelt so much already that they never noticed it.) 'But nothing, gentlemen, can daunt the spirit of a member of the Royal Geographical Society.' At this they positively yelled at me. Earl Brasston—you know old Copper-eye—slapped me on the back; he was nearly delirious, poor fellow, and drank my health, but they pulled him down, and shouted 'Go on! go on!' So I went on—I went on for nearly an hour. Upon my soul, I couldn't have believed I was capable of such eloquence. And the scene afterwards was terrific. They sent down drinks to my seamen, and I was in a panic lest they should get drunk and forget to pump, but all went well. And do you know, I'm simply loaded with invitations. And I've got to spend next week-end at Brasston, the old boy absolutely insisted. I say! I forgot to tell those fellows to stop pumping! [*He rushes to the window, opens it and shouts.*] Stop pumping there, until I let you know!

BELVOIR. Well, I suppose you feel the problem's solved?

SIR PHILO [*ever so slightly damped*]. Well, it's a solution, isn't it?

BELVOIR. And what about the enquiries Professor Hermann was making?

SIR PHILO. About that antidote? I heard from him; he has found nothing; but [*cheerfully*] I am not going to bother about that now.

BELVOIR. Do you propose to go about for the rest of your days like this?

SIR PHILO. Why not? As a matter of fact, I rather enjoy it. After all, dress is a mere matter of convention. It's only a question of getting used to it. Everybody I've seen so far has been thrilled by my appearance.

BELVOIR. And how long do you think that's going to last?

SIR PHILO. Oh! I don't know, and in any case there'll always be fresh worlds to conquer—'Tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures new.' Just imagine my first appearance in Paris at the Institut Français. Old Flammarion would think me a new star.

BELVOIR [*sighing*]. Ah, well! I suppose it's possible.

SIR PHILO. Possible, of course it's possible! It's rather different for you, I admit. My life outside this apparatus is over. I can retire to my shell, and the little society I need I can now get by taking my shell along with me. In fact, I need never come out of it. All that exists of me to-day

at my age is a voice, still issuing from this decaying body whose increasing foulness I henceforth disguise for ever. Only my spirit shall move among men, like a sound issuing out of the tomb.

BELVOIR [*thoughtfully*]. Do you know, I believe you are right.

SIR PHILO. I'm sure of it. I consider myself most fortunate. I am like a man in the Arabian Nights to whom in a dream some marvellous transformation has happened, but I am awake, and it is still true. I wouldn't go back now to the days before I ate the popomack for anything. That reminds me, have there been any answers to our advertisement in the *Times?*

BELVOIR. Not yet, but of course it is still appearing.

SIR PHILO. Did you arrange for it to appear at the same time in the Shanghai and Pekin papers?

BELVOIR. Yes, but I'm not very hopeful.

[*The bell rings and presently* NOSEGAY *enters.*

NOSEGAY. Sir Solomon Raub. [*Exit* NOSEGAY.

[*Enter* SIR SOLOMON, *in top hat, morning coat, white spats, looking as glossy and confident as ever, but with, for the curious observer, a slight uneasiness beneath his outward smooth manner. In his ears and nostrils are wads of cotton wool.*

SIR SOLOMON. How d'ye do, Belvoir?

[*He suddenly sees* SIR PHILO.

SIR PHILO [*beaming*]. 'Morning, Sir Solomon. [*He slaps him on the back, and one of the cotton-wool wads drops out.*] What's this? [*Picking it up.*

SIR SOLOMON [*slightly ruffled, snatching it and putting it in his nose again, pointing to* SIR PHILO'S *diving-suit*]. And what may I ask is this?

SIR PHILO. This is my new way of dressing, Sir Solomon. In future you will always see me arrayed, not as the inferior mass of mankind, but as one who has eaten the popomack.

SIR SOLOMON [*glaring at him*]. I'm glad you think it a subject for tomfoolery. Four days ago you told me you couldn't stand it any longer, and threatened to commit suicide. My health's getting ruined for want of sleep. I've not slept for weeks. I'm worn out rushing from place to place seeing people, to try to discover some means of getting rid of this awful thing, and here you stand and joke about it!

SIR PHILO [*cheerfully*]. Have you seen the *Times* this morning?

SIR SOLOMON. No, I haven't. I've just glanced at it!

SIR PHILO. Well, you evidently did not read the account of the Royal Geographical Society's dinner. I was the hero of it. The man from the Himalayas was nowhere.

SIR SOLOMON. You! At the dinner!

SIR PHILO. Yes.

SIR SOLOMON. How? Whatever do you mean?

SIR PHILO. I in my new popomack equipment. Didn't you notice the two sailors and the vacuum cleaner outside the house as you came in?

SIR SOLOMON. Yes. I saw some sort of machine in a car. [*Shortly.*

SIR PHILO [*triumphantly*]. Well, it's mine, but it's not a vacuum cleaner, it's a diving pump for my diving dress. I was just going when you came. I'll be off now and give you a demonstration. [*He goes and opens the window.*] Hallo! Start pumping there! [*He closes the window.*] *To* BELVOIR]. Help me to screw this on [*With the help of* BELVOIR *he screws on the face of the diving helmet, then lifts his speaking trumpet to his face.*] Call Nosegay to help me down. [BELVOIR *rings.*

[NOSEGAY *enters and takes up his air pipes.* Carefully, Nosegay! Goodbye, my boy. Au revoir, Sir Solomon. Don't forget to read that article in the *Times* [*at the door to* BELVOIR]. Let me know if you get any answer to the advertisement. [*Exit with* NOSEGAY.

[SIR SOLOMON *and* BELVOIR *sit down gloomily and listen to the car driving away. The noise fades. Silence.*

SIR SOLOMON. I always thought that man was a buffoon.

BELVOIR. Perhaps, but he has solved the problem.

SIR SOLOMON. You don't mean to say you think you can carry on like that?

BELVOIR. No, he has only solved his own problem. It remains for me to solve mine.

SIR SOLOMON. Did he tell you what Hermann says?

BELVOIR. He told me they had no hope of being able to do anything.

SIR SOLOMON. And I've heard the same from the Oriental School of Medicine in Paris.

BELVOIR. Well? I'm not going to trouble about anything of that sort in the future.

SIR SOLOMON [*alarmed*]. What do you mean?

BELVOIR [*as if thinking to himself*]. It has nothing to do with my life. To bother oneself with it at all is a mere concession to other people's feelings—like wearing a top hat at a wedding.

SIR SOLOMON [*somewhat relieved*]. Well, how many weddings would you be asked to if you made a habit of appearing in flannels, or—to use a much nearer analogy—naked.

BELVOIR. More than you think, perhaps; but I don't grant your analogy.

SIR SOLOMON. The difference is very slight, I assure you. You find it difficult to realize now. You probably forget at times that there is anything the matter with you at all since you yourself cannot notice it [BELVOIR *winces*]. But can't you remember, can't you recall what it was like when I cut it—before you ate it?

BELVOIR. Well, it can't be so unendurable when you've been sitting here for some time . . . and there's Nosegay.

SIR SOLOMON [*pointing to his nosepad*]. This is a very inadequate protection, I assure you, but nevertheless without it I could not stay here much longer. Even so, I suffer extreme discomfort.

BELVOIR [*rising*]. I've no wish to inconvenience you.

SIR SOLOMON. Please sit down. Any formality of that sort is out of place between us.

BELVOIR [*bitterly*]. Yes, you think I have lost even the right to a conventional courtesy.

SIR SOLOMON. Well, it's no use living in a fool's paradise. If I have to come into a man's presence padded like this he cannot be squeamish about trifles.

BELVOIR [*hostile*]. I am not aware that I asked you to come.

SIR SOLOMON. What do you mean? Come, don't be foolish. I only want to help you.

BELVOIR. And I am not aware of having asked for your help.

SIR SOLOMON [*with a glance at him*]. I fully understand what you must be feeling. Believe me, I have the deepest sympathy for you; especially, as you must realize, when I am in some sort the cause of your misfortune.

BELVOIR [*violently*]. Misfortune? What misfortune?

SIR SOLOMON [*a little uneasy*]. Well, well, we won't quarrel over a word. [*Soothingly.*] I have another matter to talk to you about.

BELVOIR [*coldly*]. Indeed! What is it?

[SIR SOLOMON *looks nettled for a moment, then continues smoothly*]. It's about Muriel. You, of course, realize that in the circumstances a continuance of your engagement is impossible.

BELVOIR. Impossible! Why?

SIR SOLOMON [*beginning to get ruffled*]. Surely you don't need me to tell you why! Be reasonable!

BELVOIR. Reasonable? Why should I be reasonable?

SIR SOLOMON [*is about to retort, but checks himself, then speaks*]. Lord Belvoir, I don't know why you are adopting this curious attitude, but I am sure you would not wish to take advantage of Muriel's reluctance to break off an engagement which she cannot possibly desire to continue, but which in the circumstances her natural sensitiveness may prevent her repudiating.

BELVOIR. You say she wishes to be released from our engagement.

SIR SOLOMON [*evasively but with an assumed vigour*]. Naturally, she must do so.

BELVOIR [*politely*]. You must forgive me if I fail to see the necessity or to accept the implication.

SIR SOLOMON [*angrily*]. That's nonsense! You must see that she can't possibly marry you.

BELVOIR. I am sorry not to share your low opinion of me, but I don't. I, on the contrary, think very highly of you. I think your manners are charming.

SIR SOLOMON [*exasperated*]. Don't waste your irony on me! You refuse to release her. Very well! It is not of any consequence, but I must say I'm surprised, I expected you to act like a gentleman.

BELVOIR [*with cold irony*]. I! A gentleman! Do you come into a gentleman's presence disinfected like that?

SIR SOLOMON [*shrugging his shoulders*]. I've already said that you have my deepest sympathy.

[*Rising from his seat.*

BELVOIR [*controlling himself with an effort*]. Sympathy! Do you think that if you were not Muriel's father I should tolerate these insults? I accept you such as you are; I make no reference to your defects, personal or moral, but do you therefore think yourself perfect? My God! I have at least as much difficulty in stomaching you as you have me! *You* have my deepest sympathy!

SIR SOLOMON. Thank you, but you see, unlike you, I do not need it. I at least do not fill my daughter with repulsion.

BELVOIR [*startled*]. Repulsion!

SIR SOLOMON [*mockingly*]. Does that surprise you? Why have you never been to our house during

the last three months? You simply did not dare to meet her?

BELVOIR. While there was hope I wished to spare her unnecessary annoyance.

SIR SOLOMON. Annoyance! Three months' absence to spare a woman a little annoyance! Well, let that pass, but now? Dare you see her now?

BELVOIR [*after a slight pause*]. Yes.

SIR SOLOMON [*seeming surprised for a moment, then he laughs*]. I've always said few men have the pluck to face the truth about themselves . . . You'll have a rude awakening!

BELVOIR. Perhaps, but in that case I shall feel I have had a fortunate escape.

SIR SOLOMON [*sneering*]. You do value yourself highly. What attraction do you think you can possibly have for a woman?

BELVOIR. Am I so different a person to-day from the man I was three months ago?

SIR SOLOMON. You are only physically abhorrent! But perhaps you believe in the marriage of souls?

BELVOIR [*with a slight shudder*]. I believe that I do do not exist merely as a smell.

SIR SOLOMON. That is true, though there is very little a woman gets from a man except through her senses. If there were no other man in the world, no doubt any woman would accept you. But have you something that no other man has got? [*He bursts out into laughter.*] Ha! Ha! Ha! Of course you have! Ha! Ha! Ha! [BELVOIR

waits without stirring. SIR SOLOMON *suddenly stops laughing. He continues deliberately*] Have you anything else that no other man has got which a woman can share, can appreciate and enjoy, which will make it worth her while to endure such a sacrifice as marrying you entails?

BELVOIR [*gloomily*]. That is what I have got to find out.

SIR SOLOMON. Yes, and when in your presumption you have told yourself you possess it, you have got to find that *she* desires it. Humph! like most men you are a fool where women are concerned! I tell you that in twelve months my daughter will be engaged to someone else. In twenty-four months she will be married to someone else. In three years she will have children by someone else, and the difference between those children and the children she would have had by you will not matter to her, or to the universe.

BELVOIR. It may be so, but I don't believe it.

SIR SOLOMON. Do you think that if you were blotted out to-morrow it would make any difference to the future? Do you imagine the world would cease to go on, or that it would be the poorer without you? Every hen clucks when it has laid its egg, thinking it the only egg in the Universe. Even supposing you are unique, that there is no one living exactly like you, and—which is quite another point—that your singu-

larity is of value, do you really believe that Life which has produced you once cannot produce you again?

BELVOIR. That is what I believe, what I must believe.

SIR SOLOMON. Millions of worms crawling in the Palaeozoic mud struggled like you, each one for its existence, as if the future depended upon it. But did any one worm matter? Did they matter even in their millions? Poor blind existences, they could not conceive a world without worms, as you perhaps cannot conceive a world without men, but I tell you that men *and* worms are like the foam on the waves of the sea, mere fleeting gestures of the wind signifying nothing.

BELVOIR. I do not believe it. The breath of life is not without but within. You yourself do not believe it or why should you care who marries your daughter?

SIR SOLOMON. I don't. Do you think I believe she matters, or that whomever she married I should not despise, as I despise all men, lusting after women because they can't help it, and slaving to satisfy their lusts? It is all loathsome, but I can at least cloak its loathsomeness in delighting my senses. I can feast my eyes on the beauty of the bride and the male vigour of the bridegroom, and in imagination enjoy their nuptial delight, drowning my disgust in champagne; but I will

not tolerate [*with an expression of disgust*] an offence in my nostrils, as I would not keep a stinking weed in my garden among my roses.

BELVOIR [*pale*]. Are you sure that you may not fill your daughter with repulsion?

SIR SOLOMON [*going to the door*]. You do not know women, and Muriel is not my daughter for nothing. If she never meets you again she may pity you, and even remember you with what fools call affection, but if she met you, you could inspire her only with disgust.

[*Exit* SIR SOLOMON.

[BELVOIR *turns and stares into the empty fireplace. Presently* NOSEGAY *enters with a note which he presents to* BELVOIR.

NOSEGAY. Miss Raub is downstairs, my lord, and asked me to give you this note.

BELVOIR [*opening it*]. Is she alone?

NOSEGAY. Yes, my lord.

BELVOIR [*hesitates and walks about the room*]. Ask her to come up. [*Exit* NOSEGAY. *He returns in a moment and opens the door.*

NOSEGAY. Miss Raub. [*Exit* NOSEGAY.

[MURIEL *is charmingly dressed as usual. At the doorway she falters, turns visibly pale, then walks into the room.*

MURIEL. I had to come. Why have you never been to see me?

BELVOIR [*he does not attempt to approach her, but*

moves farther away towards the piano]. Your father has just been here.

MURIEL [*involuntarily*]. What a narrow escape!

BELVOIR. Ah! You realize that!

MURIEL [*nervously*]. Why was he here—any news —anything special?

BELVOIR. If you mean, did he bring any good news, No!

MURIEL. Any bad?

BELVOIR. Not really. Tell me, Muriel, have you ever shared these fatuous expectations of my being cured of this—?

MURIEL. Why fatuous? [*hesitatingly*]. I have always hoped . . .

BELVOIR. Well, there is no hope. Do you understand? Absolutely no hope!

MURIEL [*desperately*]. I don't believe it! I can't believe it!

BELVOIR. Professor Hermann says so. Your father has heard the same thing from Paris. You see, it is something quite out of the ordinary, and in a way natural. To alter it now is like trying to change the colour of one's eyes.

MURIEL [*faltering*]. It's incredible!

BELVOIR. I have made up my mind. I am not going to waste my life going from specialist to specialist and running after every new quack, who thinks he can cure me of a disability of which I am not conscious, which in no way affects my

mental or physical vigour, and which is really as irrelevant to my true personality as a wooden leg. If I am not to become like one of these unhappy victims of imaginary diseases who exist only as a subject for medical experiment and discussion, I must abolish from my mind the very existence of this affliction. This would be quite easy for me to do if I could live absolutely alone, but as that is impossible, the only alternative is for my friends also to be completely oblivious of it, to put it completely out of their minds for ever. Those who cannot do this I shall not number among my friends, and I will take care to show them that they are not wanted. [*He pauses*, MURIEL *does not speak. Anxiously*] Muriel, you are silent! What are you thinking?

MURIEL [*softly*]. You are asking a great deal from them. You, of course, do not realize how much.

BELVOIR. Muriel! Is it so very much? To ignore a mere sensation an ugly sensation, if you will, but do they never put up with ugliness in the world about them? Are they so sensitive that they cannot tolerate a slight physical discomfort for the sake of— [*He hesitates.*

MURIEL [*gently*]. For the sake of what?

BELVOIR [*stares in front of him: he does not dare to look at her*]. I have not always wholly liked the people I have known intimately. There have been things about them, personal things, sometimes physical,

sometimes neither physical nor mental, but far deeper, which have aroused in me profound distaste. I have even felt about some that they were evil, a feeling far worse than any that can be caused by a mere physical deformity, yet I have never turned my back on them without a consciousness of loss.

MURIEL [*with a slight shudder*]. How one longs to be brave!

BELVOIR [*he does not look at her*]. Muriel!

MURIEL [*as if in a dream*]. I do not understand these things. One does them, or one doesn't do them, and one never knows what one is going to do. I am afraid of myself. What am I going to do? [*She walks slowly towards* BELVOIR, *who stands absolutely motionless, and puts her arms around him.*] Reg—! [*She faints.*

[BELVOIR *places her gently on the chesterfield and rings the bell.* [NOSEGAY *enters.*

BELVOIR. Miss Raub has fainted. Call the housekeeper, and bring some brandy.

CURTAIN

Act IV

SCENE:—LORD BELVOIR'S *old rooms in Half Moon Street. Time:—Evening. Nothing is changed except for a few books and miscellaneous articles. Seated in an armchair facing the picture is the* SECOND YOUNG MAN *of Act I. In another chair is the* FIRST YOUNG MAN. *They are smoking after dinner.*

FIRST YOUNG MAN. You say Lord Belvoir shot himself. Was it in this room?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. It isn't known whether it was here or in his bedroom.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. What was the reason?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. There were all sorts of stories about his having eaten a Popomack and smelling horribly; it was a most mysterious affair.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. I wonder you care to live here.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. I didn't intend it. But I had always wanted that picture. You remember how annoyed I was when we went back to the gallery and discovered that it had just been bought. Then when I heard all his things were to be sold I came here to see it, and when I was here looking at it, I suddenly thought why shouldn't I buy everything, and live here myself?

FIRST YOUNG MAN. What a strange idea?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Not at-all. I had always been attracted by what I had heard of Lord Belvoir, although I had never met him; the very fact that he had bought that picture seemed to be a link between us, and the impulse came over me so suddenly and was so strong it was just as if I was doing something that had always been inevitable.

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*with a shudder*]. I shouldn't like to live here. There's something queer about the place, I should feel it was haunted.

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*leaning forward*]. It *is* haunted.

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*startled*]. Good God! What do you mean?

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*in a strange voice*]. I have been trying to understand what happened to Lord Belvoir, and I often sit at night looking at that picture, and slowly, as I sit there, I feel that I am getting very near to what happened. I feel it is all round me, printed as it were indelibly upon the air, and that it requires only a very little to make it all suddenly visible. [*In a lower tone*]. That is why I have moved nothing since I came here. Everything is exactly as it was when he went out for the last time, or stood in this room and shot himself. And I'll tell you something more. I believe I know exactly where he shot himself.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. Good God!

SECOND YOUNG MAN. He came and stood in front of this picture and shot himself there [*rising and continuing with suppressed excitement*]. He stood just here, do you see? Now why did he do that? [*He clasps his head and paces up and down.*

FIRST YOUNG MAN. But how do you know all this?

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*resuming his seat*]. I suddenly saw it as I sat looking at that picture. I believe if we look at it long enough and surrender ourselves to the influence of this place, we shall see all that happened in this room [*in a whisper*]. Can't you feel that it is all here?

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*shivering*]. There's something strange about this place.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. It's Belvoir! He's here! Everything that passed through his mind as he stood gazing at that picture before he shot himself! He lived it all over again that last day, and we shall see it. Look there! Look! It's Belvoir. [*The lights go out and then rise again on the same scene. There is no one in the room but* BELVOIR *and he is reading. Presently he looks at his watch and goes to the telephone.*

BELVOIR. Mayfair 2713, yes, please. Hallo! Is that Mayfair 2713? I want to speak to Miss Raub; will you put me through? Hallo! Is that you, Muriel? . . . Yes, the same as usual! What have you been doing to-day? . . . Did you enjoy it? . . .

Who was there? . . . Yes . . . Was Clavelly there? . . . Oh, did he? . . . Yes, but I felt nervous, going out for the first time for weeks. However, it was splendidly arranged. There was not even a commissionaire at the door. I had the whole gallery to myself. Nosegay waited downstairs for me. I stayed there a couple of hours, and looked at all my favourite pictures. The English loan collection is admirable. There are some beautiful early Johns. One, a dark gipsyish girl in a blue and yellow spotted frock, dark blue blouse, and a curious bluish grey hat, lying by a mountain lake. Extraordinarily rich, but strangely still and reposeful. That alone was worth the trouble. They've got the *Smiling Woman* in there and a lot of other good things. I saw the Orpen your father lent them . . . I thought it extremely clever, but unsatisfying, rather like him. Yes, several water-colours: you know the Cotman I keep in this room and a couple of others I had sent up from Belvoir. I suppose you're going tomorrow to the private view . . . Who's going with you? . . . Oh! How is your mother? . . . No, not one so far. Phaoron tells me our advertisement for the popomack has been appearing in the Chinese papers for a good many weeks now, but that's no reason to be despondent. There are not likely to be many people alive even in China who have ever heard of it, and the news

that someone is advertising will only get about slowly . . . [*he looks at his watch*]. It's just on half-past seven . . . Must you? Where are you dining? . . . Yes, I've met them once, about a year ago . . . Good-bye, darling. You've something to say to me! What is it! Tell me now! Oh, very well, I'll ring up when you get back. About eleven, will that do?

[*He rings off, walks about the room for a few minutes, and then returns to his armchair and takes up the book he was reading. Presently he seems to have fallen asleep.* [*Enter* NOSEGAY.

NOSEGAY. There's a man downstairs, my lord, who says he has come about an advertisement. Did you expect anyone?

BELVOIR. About an advertisement. It must be about the popomack! [*Eagerly*]. Show him up. Wait a moment. What sort of a man is he?

NOSEGAY. He's a man of about fifty, my lord, and looks rather like a sailor.

BELVOIR. Very well, show him up.

[NOSEGAY *goes out and presently returns with* CAPTAIN ANTHONY, *who is carrying a large handkerchief which he holds to his nose. He wears the soft loose clothes of the* OLD MAN *in Act I, whom he exactly resembles except that he has a white beard.*

NOSEGAY. Captain Anthony. [*Exit.*

BELVOIR [*rising and holding out his hand*]. How do you do? My name is Belvoir, Lord Belvoir.

ANTHONY. Very pleased to meet you, Lord Belvoir.

BELVOIR. Will you have a cigar? Do you mind helping yourself? They're in that box. Take a chair. That's a comfortable one.

ANTHONY [*takes one*]. Thank you.

BELVOIR. I suppose it was the advertisement in the *Times* you saw?

ANTHONY. No, I never see the *Times*. I only got in yesterday.

BELVOIR. Then you've no doubt come from the East?

ANTHONY. Yes. Shanghai.

BELVOIR. Did you see the advertisement there?

ANTHONY. Well, not exactly, but I heard of it, and as I was coming home, I found out all the particulars. I thought I might come and see the person. That advertisement did not say much.

BELVOIR. It said a high price would be paid to anyone who could procure, or could inform the advertiser how to procure a popomack fruit. That seems to me quite enough.

ANTHONY. No doubt, no doubt, if it were a matter of ordinary business. But the popomack is not ordinary business. I am curious to discover how you came to know anything about it. I am astonished that you came to eat it.

BELVOIR. Well, there is very little to tell. A friend of mine received from China, where he has a business house, a popomack, and having heard how

rare a delicacy it was, he invited myself and others to dinner some three months ago. One other guest beside myself ate this fruit with the unfortunate result of which you are no doubt conscious, and we simply want to obtain another popomack. That is the purpose of our advertisement.

ANTHONY. I see. I suppose you know all about the popomack by now.

BELVOIR. Well, no one seems to know very much about it. Few people in the world have ever heard of it, and it seems highly probable that my friend and I are the only people living who have tasted one.

ANTHONY. No, that is not so!

BELVOIR. Ah! then you know where this fruit can be got?

ANTHONY. Do you mind telling me why you want another popomack?

BELVOIR. I am engaged to the daughter of the man who gave that dinner. When she has eaten it, we are going to get married.

ANTHONY. Twenty years ago, when I was before the mast, I was in a brig engaged in the island trade of the China sea. We had with us a young man who had run away from home to be a sailor; his name was Marjoribanks, but he called himself Marchbanks, same as your name is Belvoir, but you call it Beaver. We had been driven out

of our course in a storm, and at daybreak one morning we found ourselves near a small island. As we wanted water we manned a boat and landed a party who scoured about to find a spring. Presently Marjoribanks returned with a huge blue fruit which he had found growing. We decided to cut it and try it, but on opening it there came forth such a stench that no one could touch it except young Marjoribanks, who ate the whole thing under our eyes before you could say Jack Robinson. When the fruit was all gone, however, the stench remained, and seemed to come from Marjoribanks. We ducked him in the sea, but still he smelt. We didn't know what to do with him, it was almost impossible to go near him, and so we left him on the island.

BELVOIR. You mean to say you left him alone on the island?

ANTHONY. Yes, we sailed away, and for all I know he's there to this day.

BELVOIR. Could you find that island again?

ANTHONY. I daresay I could.

BELVOIR. Well, will you take my yacht *Adventures*, and bring back a popomack, or as many as you can?

ANTHONY. Well that's a proposition; but I dare say I might accept it. When shall I start?

BELVOIR. O, you can start at once.

ANTHONY. Excellent! Do you know I should rather

like to see poor Marjoribanks again. I have often thought about him.

BELVOIR. Well, I'll give you a letter to the officer in charge of the *Adventuress* at Southampton, he will supply you with all you require, and when you return wire me and come straight here with the popomack.

ANTHONY. I will. [*The scene fades. When it becomes visible again,* BELVOIR *is still in his chair. The door opens, and* NOSEGAY *appears.*

NOSEGAY. Captain Anthony has arrived, my lord.

BELVOIR [*excitedly*]. Show him up!

[*The door opens and* CAPTAIN ANTHONY *enters.*

ANTHONY. I hope you got my wire, sir.

BELVOIR. Yes, have you got it?

ANTHONY. Yes, here it is. [*He takes from a large bag a popomack and places it on the table.*

BELVOIR. I have told Miss Raub; she will be here to eat it in a few moments, and then, Anthony, we shall be married the day after to-morrow, and you must come to our wedding.

ANTHONY. I shall be delighted. [*Enter* NOSEGAY.

NOSEGAY. Miss Raub, my lord.

BELVOIR. Show her up; and, Nosegay, bring a knife and plate.

NOSEGAY. Yes, my lord.

[*Exit. The door opens and* MURIEL *enters.*

BELVOIR. Muriel! Allow me to introduce you to Captain Anthony.

[*They shake hands, and* BELVOIR *walks about the room in a state of great excitement.* MURIEL *is pale and obviously distressed.*

MURIEL [*hesitatingly*]. Reggie!

[*At this moment the door opens and* NOSEGAY *enters with a knife and plate which he places on the table. He goes out.* BELVOIR *at once takes the knife and is about to insert it in the popomack.*

MURIEL [*imploringly*]. Stop, Reggie! I came to tell you. Oh, do forgive me, but I can't!

[ANTHONY *creeps out into the shadow.*

BELVOIR [*thunderstruck*]. Muriel! What do you mean?

MURIEL [*clenching her gloved hands*]. I simply can't do it. I can't! I can't!

BELVOIR [*helplessly*]. But, Muriel, you promised. We've been months waiting for this day. I don't understand you!

MURIEL. I don't understand myself.

BELVOIR. But why this sudden change?

MURIEL. It isn't a sudden change. I've known all the time in my heart that I couldn't do it, but I've been too great a coward to tell you.

BELVOIR. But . . . Muriel, don't you love me?

MURIEL. I'm very fond of you, Reggie, but I can't marry you.

BELVOIR. Can't marry me? Muriel darling, you're frightened, but it's nothing. Now just eat this, and all will be well.

MURIEL [*firmly*]. Reggie, it's no good. I'm not going to marry you.

BELVOIR. I don't understand. What is the matter? Muriel! [*He moves towards her to take her in his arms, but she recoils.*

MURIEL. Don't make it harder for me, Reggie!

BELVOIR [*furiously*]. Hard for you, but what about me? Do you expect me to take any notice of such nonsense. [*He seizes her and kisses her passionately, but she resists strenuously and at last he lets her go.*

MURIEL. Give me some brandy quick!

[*He rushes to a cupboard and pours out some in a tumbler. She drinks it.*

MURIEL [*Coldly*]. Now will you let me go?

BELVOIR [*imploringly*]. Muriel, what's the matter with you? Why have you changed?

MURIEL. I am awfully sorry, Reggie, but I have found that my feelings are not what I thought they were.

BELVOIR [*scornfully*]. Well, your father was right. He said you'd never be able to stand me now.

MURIEL. It isn't that, I assure you.

BELVOIR. Oh, yes, it is.

MURIEL. You're wrong! Even if I ate the popomack it would make no difference really!

BELVOIR [*laughing almost hysterically*]. Oh, wouldn't it? Do you think the fellow you want to marry would have you then?

MURIEL [*flushing*]. I don't want to marry anyone.

BELVOIR [*coldly*]. Let me tell you you're a liar! Don't you think I haven't known this would happen? Here while I have been cooped up unable to take you about, other men have been seeing you, talking to you, dancing with you, riding with you! My God, to think what I've suffered! Day after day I have had to sit here absolutely helpless, knowing that every minute I was losing you, and [*with a change in tone*] losing you for ever to some worthless bounder who smells of tobacco instead of popomack!

MURIEL. I am sorry, Reggie, really!

BELVOIR. Are you quite sure you love this one? Do you know anything about love at all? How long do you think it will last?

MURIEL. I've told you before I'm not in love with anyone.

BELVOIR. I believe you. But now and then you want a man, and you're not going to take a man who will be a nuisance as I shall be. Neither are you going to sacrifice the pleasures you've been accustomed to in order to go away and live with him. You haven't got it in you to make yourself a new life with me.

MURIEL [*desperately*]. *Will* you believe me! I am acting on instinct. Do you think I'd let anything stop me if I loved you?

BELVOIR. But, Muriel, you loved me; I know you loved me.

MURIEL. Perhaps I did. I don't understand it.

BELVOIR. You'll find you love me still. It is merely this unfortunate affair. Everything will come right if you take this [*offering her the popomack*]. Do, Muriel!

MURIEL. It's no use, Reggie, I can't.

BELVOIR. Well, there's nothing more to be said. I wonder if you know what you do want.

MURIEL. I don't think what I want exists.

BELVOIR. No, and if it did, you wouldn't know it!

MURIEL. But I feel I ought not to do anything that I can resist doing. Why can't you make me want you so badly, Reggie, that I should eat the popomack, or do anything for you?

BELVOIR. Yes; blame me that you don't love me.

MURIEL. Well, you are to blame. There must be something lacking in you.

BELVOIR. My God! Why do I love you?

MURIEL. Perhaps you don't, perhaps you only think you do! [*Holding out her hand*] Good-bye!

BELVOIR [*speechless*]. Oh . . . er—good-bye.

[*She goes immediately.* BELVOIR *stands motionless for a moment and then walks about the room kicking everything that is light enough to be kicked painlessly.*] Damnation! [*He rings furiously.* NOSEGAY *enters.*] Where's Captain Anthony?

NOSEGAY. I don't know . . .

ANTHONY [*emerging from the shadows*]. Here I am.

[NOSEGAY *vanishes.*

BELVOIR [*looking towards the popomack*]. She won't touch it. [*Furiously*] She's got hold of some other man now! She's a heartless minx! Her father was right, damn him!

ANTHONY [*ironically*] I thought she'd be a wonder if she took it.

BELVOIR. But she never seemed more desirable! Why did I let her go! Fool! Why didn't I force her to eat it? My God! I am an idiot! She doesn't know her own mind. Force is what she wants. My God, I am a fool!

ANTHONY. You can easily do the trick if you want to!

BELVOIR. What's that you're saying?

ANTHONY. You can easily get your own back on these folk.

BELVOIR. What do you mean? How?

ANTHONY. Give out that you're cured by an antidote I've brought back from China. Invite them to a celebration dinner and give them the popomack disguised in the soup. Then you'll all be in the same boat, and she'll have to have you.

BELVOIR [*staring in astonishment*]. Splendid! My God, you're a marvel! What an idea! I'll fix it up at once. [*He goes to the bell and rings it.*

[NOSEGAY *appears at the doorway. The scene fades. When the lights go up the table in* BELVOIR'S *room is laid for a small dinner-party. The room seems empty. Presently the door opens and* NOSEGAY *ushers in* SIR PHILO *and* LADY PHAORON: SIR

PHILO *is in his diving-dress with helmet and trumpet.*

LADY PHAORON. Thank God he's discovered an antidote. Now you'll be able to get rid of that ridiculous affair, and lead a decent life.

SIR PHILO [*through his trumpet*]. What's that, you say, my dear?

LADY PHAORON. For God's sake pull yourself together! You're not deaf, yet, are you?

SIR PHILO. No, but your voice reverberates so, my dear, in this helmet, you have no idea.

LADY PHAORON. I said thank God he's found an antidote, so that you'll be able to walk about like a civilized human being again.

SIR PHILO. Civilized?

LADY PHAORON. You heard quite well what I said.

SIR PHILO. I don't want to be civilized. You wouldn't have thought Thotmes III civilized.

LADY PHAORON. You're not Thotmes III. You're a Georgian knight.

SIR PHILO. A what?

LADY PHAORON [*exasperated*]. A Georgian knight, you fool!

SIR PHILO [*shouting*]. What's a Georgian knight, you fool?

LADY PHAORON. God knows why I married you!

SIR PHILO. God knows what? What does God know?

[LADY PHAORON *gives him up and sits down with*

a resigned shrug. She helps herself to one of Belvoir's *cigars. They sit without speaking.* Sir Philo, *who is usually brisk and talkative, is huddled up in a dejected mass of tubes and gadgets with his trumpet dangling forlornly upon his breast. Presently the door opens and* Nosegay *ushers in* Sir Solomon *and* Lady Olivia *and* Muriel.

Sir Solomon. How d'ye do, Lady Phaoron? [*Louder.*] Well, Philo, this is a most fortunate affair. Aren't you looking forward to getting out of that rig-out?

[Sir Philo *shakes hands spiritlessly and mumbles something unintelligible inside his helmet.*

Lady Phaoron. Of course, he is; it's a godsend!

Sir Philo [*shouting through his trumpet*]. I'm sick of God and what He sends.

Lady Phaoron [*loudly*]. There's no call for blasphemy. I thought you couldn't hear unless one shouted.

Sir Philo [*shouting*]. I didn't hear. I guessed.

Lady Olivia. I'm sure you must be delighted, Sir Philo. It must have been awful for you these last three months.

Lady Phaoron. Awful! It's been positively ghastly! We've been nowhere; we've seen no one, and, what with shouting and being shouted at, my nerves are all in pieces.

Sir Philo [*to* Lady Olivia]. I've had a delightful time, the best time of my life.

[*Re-enter* NOSEGAY *with another man-servant carrying soup-tureen.*

NOSEGAY. Will you please to be seated? His lordship has instructed me to ask you to begin; he has just telephoned and will be here presently. He was very particular that you should on no account wait.

SIR SOLOMON [*to* NOSEGAY *as they seat themselves where indicated*]. Where's the antidote? Sir Philo Phaoron won't be able to eat until he has it.

NOSEGAY [*as he serves the soup*]. I don't know, sir. Perhaps Lord Belvoir will bring it with him.

SIR SOLOMON [*who is in a good humour*]. This is excellent soup, Philo. It has a most delicious flavour. What is it, Nosegay? I've never tasted it before.

NOSEGAY, It's a new recipe, sir; we've never had it before.

SIR SOLOMON. You must get Belvoir to give it to you, Olivia; don't you think it's quite remarkable?

LADY OLIVIA. It is excellent.

[*They all eat the soup except* SIR PHILO.

SIR SOLOMON [*shouting jovially to* SIR PHILO]. Can't you put one of those tubes in the soup?

LADY OLIVIA. You'll soon be able to enjoy a dinner-party again. I'm surprised you're not more excited about it. [*The soup is cleared away.* NOSEGAY *and the waiter go out.*

SIR PHILO. I think people should eat alone. I don't know whatever Belvoir wanted to find an antidote for. I was perfectly happy.

MURIEL. Well, you ask him. Here he is.

[*The door opens and* BELVOIR *enters.*

BELVOIR. Good evening! How d'ye do, Lady Olivia. [*He shakes hands with her and* LADY PHAORON *and bows to* MURIEL]. I must apologize for asking you to sit down to dinner without me, but it was unavoidable.

SIR SOLOMON. Congratulations, Belvoir. It's a most wonderful bit of fortune. How did it happen?

BELVOIR. I suppose you all notice that I've absolutely recovered.

SIR SOLOMON. Absolutely. [*The rest nod.*

BELVOIR. You can . . . smell nothing?

SIR SOLOMON. Nothing! It's wonderful!

BELVOIR. You don't seem very pleased, Sir Philo.

SIR SOLOMON. You know, I don't believe he wants to take the antidote; he likes going about in that fantastic get-up.

LADY PHAORON. Ridiculous! he must take it. Make him take it at once, Lord Belvoir.

SIR PHILO [*lugubriously*]. If there's an antidote I suppose I shall have to take it. There's no point in going about like this if you can cure yourself any minute. You'd simply be a fraud, and no one would take any interest in you.

BELVOIR [*quietly but very distinctly*]. Well, Sir Philo, allow me to tell you that you are cured already. [*They all gasp in astonishment.*] I mean what I say! Take off that suit, and prove it. [SIR SOLOMON *helps him off with his helmet.*

LADY PHAORON [*delighted*]. Cured! Oh, how can I thank you, my dear Lord Belvoir?

[MURIEL, *who has been silently watching, suddenly changes colour, the truth of the situation bursts upon her.*

MURIEL [*starting forward*]. My God, he's tricked us!

SIR SOLOMON [*turning white*]. What do you mean?

LADY OLIVIA [*shocked*]. Muriel!

MURIEL. Can't you see why we can't smell him, and why we shan't be able to smell Sir Philo? He's given us the popomack in the soup!

SIR SOLOMON. My God!

SIR PHILO [*dancing excitedly, his head bare*]. Hurray! Hurray!

SIR SOLOMON. Shut up, you blithering buffoon! [*To* BELVOIR, *who is standing calm but pale*] *Is* this true?

BELVOIR [*deliberately*]. Yes, everyone of us in this room stinks worse than a skunk, and like the skunk, we alone are unconscious of it.

LADY PHAORON [*as it slowly dawns on her*]. My God! [*She reels backward into a chair, half-fainting.*

SIR PHILO [*his expression changing from one of extreme joy to one of disappointment and exasperation*]. What! she smells too now?

BELVOIR [*grimly*]. Yes; you'll have to get another diving-suit for her.

SIR PHILO [*beaming, as this new aspect dawns upon him*]. Of course! Splendid! We'll never be able to hear each other again!

LADY PHAORON [*blubbering*]. I'll not wear one of those horrid things! I think it's wicked of you, Lord Belvoir, wicked! What have I done to deserve such treatment? I'd rather die than go about like that. [*She weeps.*

SIR PHILO [*jumping excitedly about*]. Splendid! Splendid! Belvoir, you're a marvel! She's human at last!

SIR SOLOMON [*violently*]. Do stop this idiotic jabber! You'll drive me mad! Belvoir, I think you're a scoundrel!

BELVOIR [*coldly*]. Pardon me. I ate the popomack at your house; you have now eaten it at mine. That is all.

SIR SOLOMON [*hotly*]. But I did not premeditate it. I acted in ignorance; it was a pure accident!

BELVOIR. And it is now a pure accident that you have eaten it here. The accident that Muriel no longer loves me [*pause*]. But I love her and no one else is going to have her.

MURIEL [*passionately*]. Do you think I'd have anything to do with you now? I'd rather die!

BELVOIR [*grimly*]. It is easy to say that, but wait until you have had months of isolation as I have had, months without speaking to anyone except through a telephone, and then you'll change your mind.

MURIEL [*gloomily*]. Do you think that matters? Do you think you've got me even if I am forced to live with you because there's no one else in all this world to live with? [*She clenches her hands.*] No one else in all this world!

BELVOIR [*bitterly*]. Yes, imagine that yesterday you had the whole world to live with! What is this wonderful world? A mass of squirming reptiles walking on their hind legs! There is not a single man in this universe whom you could put in my place at this moment, and say truly that you would be prepared to abandon everything for him. You cannot forgive *me* this trick, but there is no one, *no one* you could forgive, and there never will be!

MURIEL. I hate the sight of you!

BELVOIR. Perhaps I also hate you. I cannot think that love would act like this. But this way I shall win you, and if I had really loved you I should have lost you.

MURIEL. O how I hate this talk about love! I don't want to love, I want to live!

BELVOIR. Well, you shall live with me.

MURIEL. You will wish you were dead. Yes, perhaps I shall live with you, a vile, hateful life because neither of us is free, bound to each other by a hunger as basic as the need for food, yet only a partial hunger, a hunger in which only a fragment of us takes part, dragging the rest of us with it. Why couldn't you let me go, and wait?

BELVOIR. Wait! I've waited for thirty years, and now I should wait for ever, for I should meet no one. Better have you than nothing.

MURIEL. You are wrong. This way you are not getting me! You are getting nothing that will satisfy a *man!* You are no better than a dog or a monkey!

BELVOIR. I am a monkey, an enlarged and more intelligent monkey. We are all monkeys!

MURIEL [*looking at him steadily*]. Now I know why I couldn't love you. I never could understand it, but now I know.

BELVOIR. I suppose you think you are perfect, you think you could fall in love with nothing less than a god. I am not so ambitious.

MURIEL [*scornfully*]. You! Anyone would do for you. You'd fall into the first woman's arms who would take pity on you.

BELVOIR. You underrate yourself. Do you think I would have taken this trouble for anybody.

MURIEL. Oh, no doubt you have a good taste in clothes.

BELVOIR [*intensely*]. Do you know you are extraordinarily beautiful?

MURIEL. Oh, you'd be a judge of that too!

BELVOIR [*passionately*]. Muriel, I love you. Before your beauty God would tremble. I cannot live without you.

MURIEL. That is another reason why I do not love you. I can love no man who wants to find his life in me.

BELVOIR [*gloomily*]. I should find no life in you, but you would be something.

MURIEL. I don't want to be something. I want to be everything and nothing.

SIR SOLOMON [*grimly*]. Well, Belvoir, you've got the best of us and Muriel, too, for she'll never be able to marry anyone else unless she does the same as you've done, and—[*the idea suddenly striking him*] why shouldn't we? Have you any of that popomack left?

BELVOIR [*gloomily*]. I don't know. I expect so.

SIR SOLOMON [*rubbing his hands*]. But of course, that's the thing to do. Why, it will solve all our difficulties. I'll invite everyone I know; we'll have a regular banquet. By God! all my friends and all my enemies too. There are dozens of people who'd give their souls to be asked to dinner by us. Well, they shall all come! Ha! ha!

[*He laughs fiendishly.*

SIR PHILO [*almost whining*]. And what'll become of me when everyone's eaten the popomack?

[*No one takes any notice of him and he goes on mumbling disconsolately.*

SIR SOLOMON. Well, Muriel, you won't need to marry our friend Belvoir after all. You can invite the man you want.

MURIEL. Oh, you are all loathsome! I shall invite no one!

BELVOIR [*to* SIR SOLOMON]. You seem to take it for granted that I am going to give you the popomack.

SIR SOLOMON [*craftily*]. Why should you refuse? The more people there are who have eaten it the better for all of us.

BELVOIR [*uneasily, evidently wrestling with himself*]. And I shall lose Muriel. I know the craftiness of women. She won't invite the man she wants, but he'll be there, oh yes, he'll be there! [MURIEL *says nothing, but throws one profound look at him. He continues, turning to* MURIEL] You think I am weak because I need you so badly, but I tell you you are wrong. I cannot live without your beauty. I cannot live without *you*, divine spirit that you are. For there is no one who knows how beautiful you are, no one but me; no one who will watch you fade day by day upon the air with such passion and such pity. I want to possess you, for you are me. I want to find myself, for

you are myself. No one will know you; you will go about the earth unrecognized, but I know you. And because you are imperishable, and because no man will find you, I will let you go free.

[*The scene slowly fades. When it is light again,* BELVOIR *is seen seated in his chair with his book on his knee exactly as he sat down after speaking on the telephone to* MURIEL. *His eyes are closed, but it is impossible to tell whether he is asleep. There is silence. Presently a clock is heard striking.* BELVOIR *opens his eyes, and, surprised, gazes round the room. He gets up and walks thoughtfully across to the bell, which he rings.* NOSEGAY *enters.*

BELVOIR. Has a Captain Anthony been here, Nosegay?

NOSEGAY [*puzzled*]. No one of that name that I know of, my lord.

BELVOIR [*putting his hand to his head*]. Has no one been here, not Sir Solomon and Miss Raub?

NOSEGAY. No one, my lord. [BELVOIR *walks away thoughtfully.*] Is there anything else?

BELVOIR. No, very well. [NOSEGAY *goes out.* Extraordinary! [*He looks at his watch. He walks to the telephone. He takes off the receiver eagerly in obvious uneasiness*]. Mayfair 2713! Hullo! Is that Mayfair 2713? I want to speak to Miss Raub, please. Hullo! Is that you, Muriel, back safely? . . . Who brought you home? . . . Tell

me what was it you wanted to say to me? What! You're going to marry Clavelly! But, Muriel, you're engaged to me! . . . Muriel, I don't understand . . . [*He drops the receiver and walks into the centre of the room.*] I can do nothing, nothing! . . . [*He walks about the room, stands a moment in reflection and then crosses to the bell and rings it.*

[NOSEGAY *enters.*

NOSEGAY [*after standing for a moment*]. You rang for me, my lord.

BELVOIR. Go and buy me a cheap revolver.

NOSEGAY [*surprised*]. But I can't get one at this hour, my lord.

BELVOIR. What's that? Oh, of course not! Never mind, in the morning will do.[NOSEGAY *goes out.* [*The lights fade and go up again on the two* YOUNG MEN, *sitting gazing as if in a trance straight before them.*

SECOND YOUNG MAN [*slowly moving and looking round with a shudder*]. Did you see?

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*whispering*]. Yes. My God! how awful! So that was how it happened. But did I really see it, or have you been telling it to me so vividly that I imagined it all happening as you spoke?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. But how did I know it? Did I imagine it? I wonder!

FIRST YOUNG MAN. I don't understand at the end

Belvoir's waking up and finding that no Captain Anthony had ever called and that there had been no dinner party.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Well, you see, it's quite simple. Belvoir had been advertising for a popomack, and Muriel had promised to take it when they got it and then marry him; but they have been advertising for some time without success, and Belvoir has been getting more and more depressed as he never sees Muriel and he hears of her going about everywhere with other men, so that when she tells him to ring her up when she gets back home as she has something important to say, it makes him at once uneasy and works on his mind sub-consciously to such an extent that when he falls asleep in his chair he starts dreaming. When he wakes and discovers it is a dream and telephones Muriel he finds that his fear that he had lost her, which was the root of his dream, has proved correct.

FIRST YOUNG MAN. But why did he shoot himself before that picture?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Do you remember the couple in the gallery that day we saw that picture?

FIRST YOUNG MAN. I remember there was a couple sitting down.

SECOND YOUNG MAN. Yes, it was Belvoir and Miss Raub, and that picture had evidently some cherished association for Belvoir.

FIRST YOUNG MAN [*going up to the picture and looking at it*]. I see there's a red paper disc stuck in the corner of the glass. I have often seen it on pictures at shows. What does it mean?

SECOND YOUNG MAN. It means—[*he suddenly bursts into savage laughter, then stops dead and continues with slow emphasis*] it means *Sold.*

CURTAIN

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